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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001310

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TAGS: PREL PGOV ECON ETRD ENRG AM AZ IS IR TU

SUBJECT: CODEL WEXLER URGES TURKISH ACTION ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE, ARMENIA, IRAN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Doug Silliman for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Rep. Robert Wexler met August 26-27 with a wide array of top-level Turkish officials to discuss the current state of U.S.-Turkish relations and to urge them to push for greater regional support for President Obama's initiatives on Middle East peace and his willingness to deal with Iran. Wexler argued that if Turkey wants to play the role of mediator in the Middle East peace process, it needs to work to restore credibility with Israel. He also urged the GOT to show positive movement on the Armenian normalization talks. In addition, he discussed the GOT's recent "democratic initiative," intelligence sharing, U.S.-Turkish commercial relations, energy, and the status of EU accession talks. End summary.

¶2. (U) In a whirlwind visit to Ankara August 26-28, Congressman Robert Wexler met with President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, newly-elected Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly Mehmet Ali Sahin, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, National Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul, Energy Minister Taner Yildiz, and State Minister for EU Affairs Egemen Bagis. He also held a roundtable event with leading Turkish intellectuals organized by the German Marshall Fund. Rep. Wexler delivered the same consistent messages to all interlocutors.

Middle East Peace Process

¶3. (C) In all his meetings except Yildiz, Wexler stressed the need for urgent action on Middle East peace and encouraged Turkey to use its influence with the Arab world to convey this sense of urgency. He observed that Israeli PM Netanyahu's recent move toward freezing settlements is a major shift brought about by the new U.S. position, but there has been no corresponding movement on the Arab side, which seems to feel that it does not have to budge at all from the Arab peace initiative. Turkey can play a key role in pushing the Arab world to action, he argued, but if it wants to play an active role in mediation, it needs to regain its credibility with the Israeli public and do more to repair the damage wrought by the Davos incident.

¶4. (C) Gul noted that he has consistently pressed regional leaders to take advantage of the opportunity presented by President Obama and to support him. He also has stressed that a solution to the issue cannot come from the U.S. alone, but that the region has a responsibility to participate.

15. (S) Davutoglu promised that he would share Wexler's concerns with the Arab world during an upcoming regional tour to Egypt, Jordan, and possibly Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian territories. He noted that the three months leading up to the Palestinian elections will be critical and that Turkey supports President Obama's initiative without reservation.

Armenia

16. (C) Wexler expressed his appreciation for the courageous moves the GOT has taken in starting the normalization process with Armenia. He noted his concern, however, that the lack of apparent progress since April has given ammunition to Turkey's opponents. Wexler urged the GOT to "declare" to the Parliament the progress made to date and show forward momentum.

17. (C) Erdogan responded that he "will do this" when Parliament reconvenes in October. Gul admitted that negotiations with Armenia have not been as successful as hoped. He expressed his hope that President Sargsian would accept his invitation to the soccer match in Bursa on October 114. Gul also stressed the importance of Russia's support to resolution of the issue, saying that it can effectively veto any solution. He noted that he had personally spoken with both Putin and Medvedev and received assurances that they do want to see the situation resolved. Davutoglu stressed that the normalization is part of Turkey's "zero problem" foreign

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policy with its neighbors, not a response to U.S. pressure, and that Turkey is committed to a resolution to meet its own interests. He observed that just as Armenia is constrained by Russia, Turkey cannot ignore Azeri interests and Armenia needs to understand that normalization with Turkey is not a card it can play in the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations.

Iran

18. (C) Wexler underlined the resolve of President Obama to prevent Iran from being a nuclear power and urged Turkey to convince Iran that it should reach out and accept the President's outstretched hand. Gul noted that Iran is going through a complicated internal power struggle and that the leadership is confused about what to do with the U.S. During a visit to Tehran in March, Gul met with Supreme Leader Khamenei and Ahmedi Najad and urged them to accept President Obama's offer. He claimed that they did not refute any of his points, but were also unsure about how to proceed. On the nuclear issue, he said that it is no longer just a program of Ahmedi Najad and the mullahs but rather a goal of many Iranians. He felt, however, that President Obama is supported by a majority of Iranians so there is an opportunity for action.

Intelligence Sharing/Counterterrorism

19. (C) Erdogan expressed his gratitude for the intelligence sharing against the PKK, but indicated a desire for still further cooperation in eliminating this terrorist threat. In the meeting with the National Defense Minister, Gonul echoed the PM and said the cooperation to date has made Turkey's fight against PKK terrorism much more successful. Gonul told Wexler that Turkey sought to procure UAV systems from the U.S., and said that Secretary Gates had warned him that while the Administration supported the sale in principle, the U.S. Congress might not support the sale of an armed UAV to Turkey. Gonul expressed hope that Wexler would be a strong proponent of this transfer. Wexler said he recognized how important these systems would be to Turkey's efforts, but pointed out that the best way to speed passage of these

systems through Congress would be for Turkey to take action on improving relations with Armenia and on re-opening Halki Seminary.

Democratic Opening

¶10. (C) All interlocutors mentioned the GOT's recent Democratic (Kurdish) Initiative, and Wexler expressed his support for the courageous move. Gul described it as a "wholesale effort for higher democratic standards" while Erdogan asserted it is both an anti-terror initiative and an original goal of the AKP. He noted that the project aims to provide not only expansion of minority rights, but also education, health services, energy, roads, and urban transformation to the underserved eastern region. He expressed his disgust with the "ugly accusations" of the opposition that it is a U.S. project, and emphasized that this is a Turkish plan for Turkish citizens.

¶11. (C) Wexler pointed out that the opening also provides space for dealing with the rights of other minorities, and as an example emphasized the positive benefits that could result from addressing the concerns of the Greek Orthodox community.

Bagis indicated that he would consider a private meeting with the Greek community during a future visit to DC to discuss these possibilities.

¶12. (C) During the German Marshall Fund event, the angst of the opposition parties over the plan was clear. Representatives from several smaller parties complained less about the nature of the project and more about the way the government simply announced it without consulting them. Wexler noted that there is room for legitimate disagreement on the tactics of the opening, but that the opposition needed to be credible and rational in its approach and not resort to the politics of fear and prejudice to lower the level of

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discussion, as with allegations of U.S. involvement or plans to dismember the Turkish state.

U.S.-Turkish Commercial Relations

¶13. (C) Erdogan, Gul, Davutoglu, and Bagis all made reference to the need to increase U.S.-Turkish commercial relations and the commitment of President Obama to form a task force to address this need. Bagis and Davutoglu both speculated that there was a secret executive order to restrict Turkish trade as the only explanation for why trade with the U.S. has not tripled as it has with Russia (Note: This argument ignores both geographical differences and the fact that Turkey's trade with Russia is almost entirely imported hydrocarbons, which tripled in price. Turkish exports to Russia in 2009 are only marginally higher than exports to the U.S. End note.) Both also raised the perennial idea of Qualified Industrial Zones in Turkey as a quick way to increase trade.

¶14. (C) Wexler dismissed the idea of a secret executive order, but agreed that the economic leg of the relationship needs to be strengthened. He argued that this will need to be driven by the private sector, but that there seem to be opportunities especially in clean energy and in pharmaceuticals.

Energy

¶15. (C) Energy Minister Yildiz told Wexler that Turkey has fulfilled its responsibilities with regard to Nabucco by hosting and signing the Nabucco IGA and thus has done its part for EU energy supply security. In the past several months, Turkey has been examining other possible energy projects to see which are feasible, including the recent deals with Russia, a deal with Georgia on electricity, deals

with Syria on electricity and gas, talks with Qatar on gas supplies, and work with Greece and Italy on the Interconnector for Turkey-Greece-Italy (ITGI). He said Turkey has "reached the signing stage" on a gas agreement with Azerbaijan.

¶16. (C) In response to Wexler's questions about areas for increased business cooperation between the U.S. and Turkey, Yildiz suggested oil and gas exploration in the Black Sea and joint ventures in third countries such as Iraq. He said Turkey also has strong potential for solar and wind power but needs lower technology costs to speed development. Yildiz stressed the importance the GOT places on private sector investment in the energy sector and said he would support increased U.S. investment.

EU Accession

¶17. (C) Bagis admitted that progress on EU accession talks has slowed, and that getting substantial results has become more difficult. He argued that there has been technical progress in reform but that he must constantly pull new rabbits out of the hat and show continued movement to overcome increasing resistance both in Turkey and in Europe. He expressed his regret that Turkey had only opened one chapter during the Czech presidency and was pessimistic about the chances to open more during the Swedish term. He was especially frustrated by the freeze on the energy chapter, which complicates discussions in an area where Turkey can be of massive benefit to Europe.

¶18. (U) Representative Wexler did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

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